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**Friends with Benefits: On Documenting the Struggle of a Friend**

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**Friends with Benefits: On Documenting the Struggle of a Friend**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For Selené Hernandez Penalosa.



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My supreme gratitude goes to God for giving me something to be inspired about and always working things out.

## **Abstract**

### **Friends with Benefits: On Documenting the Struggle of a Friend**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Andrew Garrison

Selené is a 24-minute documentary film about a 24-year-old drug addict's struggle to reconcile her addictions with her faith in God. The following report gives an account of the documentary's conception and actualization. It also highlights the filmmaker's intention and reflection throughout the creative process. Supplementary materials include the original proposal for the film as well as screenshots from the completed documentary.

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## **About Selené**

Selené Hernandez is one of the most wonderful, yet frustrating people I have ever known. We met through our mutual friends Joseph and Puteri Astran, who met her at a church conference. I do not remember what my first impression of Selené was, but when I think of her now I think of childlike enthusiasm and earnestness- like a crayon drawing of a flower or butterfly. She hesitantly joined my group of church friends in late 2014, coming to church only on occasion. One time we went out as a group for ice cream and she regaled us with stories of drug cartels in Mexico and her extended family's involvement with them. My best friend, who was visiting at the time, expressed the desire to make a film about her, but I brushed it off. I was too busy working on my pre-thesis documentary film: a short piece about a 21-year-old sophomore who was trying to win custody of her 10-year-old half-brother from her mother because she believes her mother to be negligent. However, as Selené and I became better friends I became more and more interested in her story.

Selené is a drug addict. Her drugs of choice have been marijuana, cocaine and ecstasy. However, in social situations she will try whatever drugs are available. In July 2015, on a whim, Selené and her brother decided to attend a large Seventh-day Adventist conference in San Antonio. They had been members of the church before but had long since stopped attending services. She really enjoyed the presentations about health and education at the conference and decided to continue attending church when she returned to Austin.

Shortly after the conference, Selené asked God to take the desire to smoke marijuana away from her. He did. She had no desire to smoke anymore. She did not even experience withdrawal.

She describes her time being sober as the happiest that she has ever been. Unfortunately, drug addiction is not Selenè's only difficulty in life. Up until the DREAM act was passed, Selené was undocumented. She was slipped into the USA from Mexico when she was 8. Her mother and father had come into the country earlier and paid someone to bring her in. Her mother and father's relationship was rocky at best. Her father was a drug addict who violently abused Selenè's mother. She remembers having to mop blood off the floor on multiple occasions because her father had beaten her mother so much. He died in police custody when Selené was 16. He was arrested, beaten up and strapped into a chair so that he couldn't breathe. The case was decided as "accidental death." Selené, who at the time was working as a legal aide at a law firm, filed an appeal but the case was dismissed.

Selenè's mother works three cleaning jobs. She currently has seven children. The oldest is 25-years-old and the youngest is 3-years-old. Selené is the 2<sup>nd</sup> born at 24 years. The children come from three different fathers, none of whom are currently with Selenè's mother. Because Selenè's mother is always working, Selené, as the first-born girl, spent most of her childhood taking care of her siblings. She describes her teenage years as a time of changing diapers and putting kids to bed.

Selenè's first introduction to drugs came in middle school, when her older brother gave her a blunt. Apart from a few short periods of sobriety, Selené has been using since.

To escape her chaotic home life, Selené left her hometown of Dallas, TX for Austin, TX. She moved in with her boyfriend, Ali, who was attending The University of Texas. She lived with him for about a year before he cheated on her and they broke up. She then started seeing her colleague, Murphy. He would soon become another addiction that she struggled with.

I first met Selené while she was with Ali. She was outgoing but elusive. It felt like she needed a friend but it was really hard to be friends with her because she was (and still is) quite terrible at responding to messages or showing up to events. Although she eventually drifted away from the group, she rejoined us in July and began her journey back to sobriety. Around this time I was looking for a subject for my graduate thesis film.



## **About Me**

I am a Christian. It is my first and most important identity. It comes before being a woman, a filmmaker and even a dog-owning cat-lover. That said, I am also a female, filmmaking, dog-owning cat-lover. When I first got to film school, I had a clear idea of what stories I wanted to tell; I just didn't know how to tell them. Having just completed a short fiction film a year before, I knew for sure that I wanted to make documentaries. I wanted to tell simple stories of people, preferably from minority populations and preferably Christians, making a positive difference in their communities.

My first project at the University of Texas at Austin was a short documentary about African immigrants in America. I interviewed a Chemistry PhD student who had been in the US for 3 years, an electrical engineer who had been in the US for 10 years, and a software engineer who had been in the US over 30 years. My goal was to find out what their experience at integrating in this society had been and whether they would ever return to their home countries. I made this documentary mainly because I was asking myself these questions too. So much time and effort had gone into bringing me to the United States. I wanted to know what the future looked like and if it was worth it. I was surprised that there is not that much information online about African immigrants to America. There are a lot of documentaries and even fiction films about refugees and asylum seekers who come to the United States but the media is silent on the stories of people like me- middle class students who come here just to get an education. I was

surprised to find that my first impressions of the United States and the opinions expressed by my subject who had been here much longer than I, were remarkably similar. In fact, all my subjects basically said the same thing, “You will never fit in here. This is not your home. But, you will never fit in back home either. You are probably going to stay.” It was also interesting how each one of them pushed the plan to return home to the next phase of life. The experience of making a documentary by myself for the first time was eye opening. I was doing exactly what I wanted to do.

I went on to write and direct a short fiction film about a couple that comes home to find a burglar in their house. The tables turn when the wife manages to get the gun from the burglar and now has to make the choice whether she will kill him or forgive him. The experience of making this fiction film cemented my conviction that fiction filmmaking is not for me. While my cast and crew were absolutely amazing to work with, I found the experience very unfulfilling. Something about knowing that the story is not real makes the process of fiction filmmaking meaningless to me. I do, however, greatly admire my colleagues in the field who are so good at creating powerful and thought-provoking fiction films. It is my great pleasure to enjoy their work. I have found that I have a different calling.

Being a Christian in the highly secular world of filmmaking is hard. Many times I have found myself participating in discussions and working on projects whose themes and values greatly contrast my own. Often I have struggled with what God would expect of

me in these situations. For example, one of my schoolmates needed help on a film she was making about witches. I am definitely not in support of the practice of witchcraft, or in the normalization of it in the media. However, this girl is my good friend and I really wanted to help her out in any way that I could. I also did not want to offend her. Thankfully, I was going to be out of the country at the time when she needed help so I didn't have to confront that situation. On another occasion, one of my classmates was making a short about a teenage girl who was making a feminist pornographic film for her class project. For a year I had to sit through discussions about how this film could be made better, when everything in me did not think that this film should be made at all. Then I had an epiphany. Each of my classmates and colleagues were making films about topics and causes that they thought were important. For some reason, I had decided that matters of my faith somehow did not meet this criterion. I decided that if I had to sit through discussions on movies that condone the idea of women being objectified, then I could also make a movie about a Christian doctor who was fired from public office for sharing in church that homosexuality is not supported in the Bible, even though his 3-year track record as a public servant was exemplary and there was no evidence of his having treated anybody of unfairly. I could make this movie and my classmates would have to discuss it, because my opinion is valid too. In the end, the doctor's lawyers decided that a film would prejudice his legal case. However, this new understanding liberated me. I can make whatever movie I want.

When time came to make my thesis film, I was struggling to find something that was both visually interesting and fit with my values. The pressure to make a deep, meaningful thesis weighed heavily on me, especially since the thesis films that have come out of my program have literally been award winning. The idea of making a film about Selené kept coming back to me but I was apprehensive about making a film about my friend's struggle. First, I did not think she would agree to it but also because I did not want to seem like I was taking advantage of her difficulties to get a grade. I was also worried about how I could be an objective observer and at the same time be a good friend and advisor. As my ideas fell through, one after the other, I finally decided that I would ask her. It was late October 2015. At this time Selené had been sober for 3 months. She said yes.

## **The Plan**

I quickly put together a project proposal and treatment for the film. My vision was to tell a triumphant story about how Selené overcame her traumatic past by God's grace and is now making steps towards becoming a certified pre-K teacher. The proposal is attached to this report.

In addition to a main interview, the major events that we planned to film were:

- Thanksgiving in Dallas
- Job-hunting
- Interacting with friends from her old life
- Interacting with friends from church
- Practicing for the church nativity play
- Generation Youth for Christ Conference in Louisville, KY

My camera of choice for this project was the Canon C100. Its build, audio XL-R inputs and built-in ND filters make it particularly useful for filming on my own. It also works really well in low-light situations. I chose not to work with other crewmembers as I had already established a good friendship with Selené and I did not want to introduce a new person who might have made her less likely to talk openly.

One big concern for me was that her friends and family might not let me film them. I knew from past experience that getting access to the school where she worked would also

be very difficult. These turned out to be valid concerns; her sister-in-law would not let me film at her house, and the school denied me access.

## **The Execution**

In hindsight, I should have filmed an interview with her as soon as she agreed to make a documentary, but I was still apprehensive about putting her in front of a camera. I felt like the pressure would make her change her mind about filming. Our first shoot was her family thanksgiving get together in Dallas. We drove down together at about 7:00 pm on a Wednesday and arrived at her mother's house at around 10:30pm. Her siblings were home but her mother wasn't there. They were surprised to see me with a camera and after a few minutes I realized that Selené had not told her family about our project. This foreshadowed many "surprises" that awaited me on my quest to document Selené's life. I introduced myself and tried to make them feel as comfortable as possible. The younger children forgot about the camera really quickly but her teenage sisters avoided the being in frame. I managed to get some really good footage of her playing with her younger brother and sister.

The next day, Selené wanted to show off her new lifestyle by making a vegan dish for her family. She had already bought all the ingredients but the kitchen was not clean. This marked the beginning of many moments when I had to choose whether to help or film. I chose to help her clean up but to film her cooking. While she was cooking her brother came in and informed us that her sister-in-law did not want me filming at their house. She was embarrassed that the house was not as put together as it could have been. This was really frustrating because I had sacrificed my thanksgiving plans in order to spend

thanksgiving with Selené and her family and now I was not allowed to film anything. I was very upset but tried to stay friendly to her family in the hopes that as time went on they would let me film. Later that evening, Selené was reading Bible bedtime stories to her younger siblings and her nephew. I knew the opportunity to come back to Dallas and film with her family might not come again and so I took out my cell phone and filmed the scene. I focused mainly on Selené and kept her family out of view as much as possible. This marked another first for our filmmaking journey. A lot of footage in the final film is actually from my cell phone camera because things would happen when we were spending time together as friends and I did not have the chance to check out the school camera and film. The people around her also seemed most comfortable when I was using my cell phone to film instead of the c100 (which, for all its portability, is still a big and intimidating camera). I'm glad I filmed in Dallas because she ended up having an argument with her siblings about going to bed. It was 10:30 pm and the younger kids wanted to stay up but Selené was insisting that they should have been in bed at least three hours earlier. In the end her siblings won and she and I went to sleep while the rest of the family went Black Friday shopping. Selené was really frustrated and decides to cut her visit short.

The central scene in my movie was filmed the next day when Selené took her little brother, Junior, out for lunch at an Indian restaurant. Here she tries to explain to Junior how, unlike her, he can be anything he wants to be because he is a US citizen. She struggles to put into words concepts like social security, financial aid and citizenship.



Junior is more interested in eating and their conversation is cut short when the food arrives. Selené leaves her brother's house later that day because she did not want to be there any more. We end up at my cousin's house in Dallas. The next day we head back to Austin.

While I was upset about not getting as much out of the Dallas trip as I had planned, I was hopeful about the rest of the project. Selené however, was at the beginning of a downward spiral. She had reestablished conversation with her ex-boyfriend Murphy. This was a co-worker she had been seeing on and off before but had completely broken ties with after she rejoined the church. Murphy had never actually wanted to be in an exclusive relationship with Selené but Selené, by her own confession, was obsessed with him. He finally conceded to being "official" then changed his mind a few months later. Selené had stopped talking to him for the four months she was sober but around November 2015 they began speaking again. Selené started avoiding her friends from church. She would not answer calls or respond to messages. Finally I went over to her house and she confessed that she was using marijuana again. The idea of not being with Murphy was so overwhelming to her that she decided she needed to smoke for a little bit to carry her through that time and then she could quit. This was a devastating moment for me, and yet another one where I was caught off-guard. I wanted to film our conversation but I sensed that Selené needed me to be her friend at that moment. Against my instincts, we just spoke for a long time about what this decision meant for her future. We agreed to film the main interview later that weekend.

Selenè's decision to use again challenged the whole premise of my film. My original story was about a young woman who had overcome everything and was making positive changes to her life. Instead, it became about watching Selené make terrible choices, over and over again. As her friend it was heartbreaking to see her put herself through so much suffering. As a Christian it made me so sad to know that she could have perfect peace and avoid so much heartache if she would be willing to surrender her fears and anxieties to God instead of trying to forget them by drinking and smoking.

One of the most mentally tasking moments of the project came when I was filming her smoking a joint at her house. It was the first time in my life I had consciously been in such close proximity to someone smoking weed. Yes, my life has been very sheltered. I was worried that I would get high. It also became very real to me what her life has been. All along we had been talking about her drug addiction as a thing in the past and it was very abstract. At this time I realized how much she actually depended on weed to deal with the difficulties that came her way. At the time she was smoking so that she could be calm enough to tell a close friend at church who had shown a romantic interest in her that she was back to using again. She knew he would be disappointed and could possibly end their friendship. He ended up postponing the phone conversation and she basically sent me home because Murphy was coming over to spend the night.

The real test of our friendship came a few weeks later when Selené decided to not attend the Generation Youth for Christ Conference (GYC) in Louisville Kentucky. She had been planning this trip, scheduled over New Year's weekend, for months in advance. I thought it would be a critical moment in the documentary, giving the audience a chance to see her interact with the outside world, so I borrowed money to pay for my flight and cancelled my holiday plans. Two days before we were scheduled to leave, Selené called me and told me she did not feel like going. She had cancelled her ticket and hotel. She apologized, but I did not believe her apology and I told her so. I was extremely upset and felt deeply betrayed as her friend. It hurt me because I felt that even though I had always been there for her, she would not make a small sacrifice for me.. I attempted to swallow my pride and anger and scheduled a filming session for the next day, hoping to convince her to change her mind. I ended up filming her calling the hotel to confirm her cancellation. I took the trip by myself.

It seems I did not do a good job of masking my feelings because when I got back from Louisville, Selené asked me to stop filming. She said that she was uncomfortable because of how upset I was. This made me even angrier but at this point I tried to suppress my anger and made no efforts to change her mind. I was going to make do with what I had already filmed. My biggest desire was to just move on from Selené and onto happier things, but the voice in my head wouldn't let me. Even when I was upset with her I would still send her encouraging quotes and Bible verses. I kept thinking that if I give up on her,

then she might not have anyone left. At this point our relationship was mostly one-sided.

She was not responding to my messages or invitations to hang out.

## **The Assembly**

The spring semester began and I was working on everything except my thesis. It took me until March to even bringing it into the editing software. I slowly began to work on an assembly. This process took over a month but by April 2016 finally had a 30-minute cut. It was not great. This delay in the editing process forced me to postpone my graduation from spring to summer. My parents were not amused. My mother did not speak to me for a week. Spring 2016 was one of my hardest semesters at UT. It took all of my energy to keep working on my film. My committee chair encouraged me to find my movie in my footage. He asked a lot of good questions and made comments in a manner to suggest that I might have a movie. I also prayed about the situation a lot. I asked God to help me make a move that would honor Him and to please fix things with Selené if I needed to keep filming. I was really worried about her. She seemed to be moving further and further away from God and deeper into the use of drugs and alcohol. I did not know how to reach her, since she was not on speaking terms with me. As I was putting together the scene where she plays with her siblings, I thought that she might like to see it. I was not ready to show her the footage yet but I took a few screenshots and texted them to her. She responded positively and asked for more- she even offered to cook dinner for me the next week, which is very surprising because Selené rarely cooks. We ended up going to the Chipotle and Selené surprised me by apologizing for bailing out on me earlier in the year. She confessed that she was under a lot of stress at the time but after much thought she felt

that she should finish the movie. She wanted the world to know that God can use a person, even if they are not perfect. I was dumbstruck.

We resumed filming a few weeks later on South Congress street where she paints and tries to sell her art on the street. It was at this time that I found out she had quit her earlier job as a pre-K teacher and had been fired from her most recent job. She was also running out of money.

A few weeks later, Selené called me and calmly told me that she had almost overdosed the day before but that she was okay. She had taken a few pills and had had a lot of alcohol. Her body could not handle it and she began to throw up. She thought she was going to die and she passed out. While passed out she had a dream where God spoke to her and told her that He could not always take care of her. She needed to make a choice because He could not always be with her in the places she chose to go. After hearing this, she woke up immediately. My first instinct was to go see her but I was afraid because it was nighttime and her apartment complex is not known for its great security. She had told me before that sometimes people came into her apartment with guns. I said a prayer and went anyway. Music was blaring at full blast from her apartment and the house was full of men. Selené was painting in the corner; dressed in a green halter-top and short black flowing shorts. She was singing at the top of her lungs. She seemed really excited to see me and proceeded to introduce me to everyone in the room as, “one of her best

friends.” She seemed very hyper. I asked her if I could film and she accepted. This scene ended up being a key scene in the documentary showing the completion of her arc.

The situation only got worse for Selené. While driving one night she swerved to avoid a stalled car and ended up going off the overpass and landing on a one-way street below. Her car was totaled and she got a ticket for reckless driving. She was unable to pay her rent and, because her car was totaled, she did not make the hearing in court leading to her eviction. By this time she had made the choice to quit smoking and drinking again. She moved in with her neighbor but his roommates accused her of stealing and attacked her in the middle of the night and she had to move out again. She is currently living with a friend from her church, trying to find a new job and working toward renewing her relationship with God again.

## **The Edit**

My main challenge with telling Selenè's story is in making it coherent on film. Not all of the details mentioned here are explicit when you watch the movie but they all, and many others, factor into the choices that Selené makes. As I worked on more and more iterations, I received similar feedback from my professors:

- She did not seem to have a clear goal, making it difficult to relate to her or root for her, even though you felt sorry for her.
- The story was missing a hook. The audience didn't feel compelled to watch the story to the end.
- The story built up well but did not have a satisfactory ending.

I made over ten different cuts trying to address these issues. My main concern was that because her story is already complicated, I absolutely wanted to tell it in chronological order. I also felt that I would be cheating if I moved things around in order to create the illusion of ups and downs when that is not how it actually happened.

I shared my cut with Anne Lewis, a senior lecturer in my department who has always given me the best advice when I have deep problems with my cut. She sat with me for almost three hours and by the end I had a much better working structure than I did before.



Finally, I compromised and moved one scene of her telling a story to the children at church from the beginning of the film to the end of the film. This scene did not take place in the chronological order that it appears in in the film, but I believe it aptly represents the experience that Selené was going through at the time that I was unable to capture on film. This move made me think of something my classmate Shelby Hadden told me about documentary filmmaking: It is basically telling a million lies to tell the truth. That statement bothers me but after moving that scene I understood it better.

Another challenge I faced was the lack of proper coverage. Being the only person shooting, I found it really difficult to focus on my subject, as well as get an adequate footage of her surrounding. This led to numerous close up and mid-shots and not enough establishing shots, making it a little hard to tell where she is in the film. Moving forward I definitely have a better idea of what shots are imperative to make my scenes work, even in a documentary.

## **The Lessons**

The movie is almost complete and will screen in December at the Radio-Television-Film End of Semester screening for UT at Austin. All semester, my committee chair has been asking me what I am trying to say with this film. Each time he asks I think I have given him a different answer- maybe because I am embarrassed by the truth but more likely because I was afraid I was not achieving my goal. With this movie I want to show that God works in us and through us, despite our weaknesses. When I first began filming, I thought that this would be a straight cut story where someone moves from guts to glory. I was reminded along the way that life does not work like that. This movie shows how messy change can be, but it also shows that change is possible- even slowly. My perspective on drug users has changed too. A year ago I would have had no patience for a Bible-believing Christian who succumbs to drug use rather than choosing to fight. I would have felt sorry for her but secretly judged her for not trusting God enough or not being strong enough. Now I feel empathy. Even though many times I do not agree with her choices, I understand them better.

I have also learned the need for surrender. When Selené stopped talking to me I felt like I had wasted a year. I even started researching other projects. However, through time and space, and trusting everything to God, I believe my movie is many times better than anything I could have made in the Spring semester. I am glad I had to wait because I was

able to capture not just her fall, but also her recovery. While the road ahead for Selené will be difficult, I believe that she is on the path to recovery and all will be well.

Just today she sent me a message saying that she is ready to meet with a counselor and confront her past. This film has helped me see that we can take as many chances as we need. So long as we are breathing we can find our way back.

I am looking forward to making many more films like this one. I am taking my lessons on perseverance and getting proper coverage and I am off to find my next subject.

## **Appendix A- Proposal**

# **Selenè**

**A documentary short by  
Weslie Onsando**

**Contact:**

**<http://wesliefilms.com>**

## **TREATMENT**

Selenè Penalosa Hernandez is a Christian: a vegan, Sabbath keeping, long dress-wearing, Seventh-day Adventist Christian. This is new to her. Less than a year ago she was a perpetually stoned party girl, who regularly went on “coke” (cocaine) diets. She was also fixated on her workmate, Murphy, who she knew only wanted to “hook up” with her. Eventually he accepted to be her boyfriend but then broke up with her a few months later at a wedding. She ran back to the church of her childhood. For the past eight months she has been clean and sober. Through prayer and support from her church community she has managed to maintain the positive changes in her life. However, life apart from Murphy (the ex-boyfriend now) is taking its toll and things are starting to fall apart. She works as a daycare teacher but is ardently applying for new jobs so that she can be away from him. She still loves him. He still only wants to hook up with her. In addition to this, her family does not approve of her new lifestyle. Her siblings accuse her of abandoning them in Dallas in order to live a carefree life in Austin. They are undocumented. She does not visit home often but when she does they fight. She struggles with maintaining ties to her friends and family while upholding her chosen new lifestyle. This documentary follows her through this time of personal growth and transformation from a life of addiction to a practicing Bible believing Christian.

## **AIM**

To explore if/how a person can completely change who they are and what that means

To demystify what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian

## **STRUCTURE**

The backbone of the story is Selenè's journey to fully committing a Christian lifestyle. We meet her as an active church member: She gives the children sermon, is acting in the Christmas nativity and actively spends time with other church members. Slowly she becomes more withdrawn from the church and at the time of writing she is moving further away from the church and reconnecting to her old friends. Cinema Verité footage of her interacting with her friends, family and co-workers will be intercut with sit-down interviews with her and the people in her life- past and present.

Potential scenes include:

**Thanksgiving at her brother's house:** Selenè has 6 other siblings ranging from 3 years to 25 years of age who live in Dallas. They mostly have different fathers. Her own father passed away from a drug overdose when she was a teenager. Her mother is still alive but holds three jobs, so the family rarely sees her. Her family is very secular and is not approving of her change in character. Only her bigger brother is slightly supportive. This thanksgiving she planned to spend four days at her brother's house. She had to cook her own thanksgiving meal because as a vegan she couldn't have most of the traditional thanksgiving meal and her family didn't make any accommodations for her. She then

spends the night forcing her little brother and sister to turn off the TV, listen to a Bible story and go to bed. There are tantrums. There is yelling. Eventually the children go to sleep but are woken up later by her elder brother to go Black Friday (Really late Thursday night) shopping. Selenè is so frustrated she decides to leave the next day.

**A day with her younger brother:** Before Selenè leaves Dallas on Friday she takes her younger brother out for lunch and a movie. He is 7 years old and her favorite. In the car ride and at the restaurant she tries to explain to him why he doesn't have to work with mom as a cleaning lady and how his privilege as an American citizen allows for him to have bigger dreams.

**Happy Hour:** While she has given up drinking and smoking for almost 8 months, the pressure of not being able to have a relationship with her ex-boyfriend, Murphy, catches up with her. She reverts back to her old habits and reunites with old friends at a bar one evening for a welcome back happy hour.

**Practicing and performing in the church nativity play:** The young people at her local church are staging a production of the birth of Christ, as told to a child who wants to hear a Christmas story. Selenè is cast as Sarah, the aunt who skips out on the Santa story and tells her niece the true story of Christmas. This play will be performed during the main service at the church on Sabbath morning. Murphy may be in attendance.

**Church:** Selenè has made strong connections with the members of her church. They have multiple meetings during the week to meet, eat, pray and/or celebrate.

**Job Hunting:** Selenè working on her résumé and applying for various job openings whenever she can. Including in the middle of practice for the play.

**Teaching:** Interacting with her children and co-workers at school.

**GYC Conference:** This is annual youth conference held Seventh-day Adventist young people from all over the world every January. The church has partially sponsored Selenè's attendance fee so she will spend four days in Louisville Kentucky praying, listening to sermons, making friends and trying to stay sober.

Sample links may be found here

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B2Wtjtji9k8TbmpNSHkwelBOT00&usp=sharing>

Potential Interviews:

Darnel: Selenè's older brother, He is curious about Christianity but is upset that Selenè seems to have abandoned her family.

Puteri: The lady who prayed for Selenè and encouraged her to become a Christian

Murphy: Selenè's on and off boyfriend

Claudia and Tracy: Selenè's former roommates and partners in crime



## **VISUAL STYLE**

High key, high saturation filming will complement Selenè's playful and childlike character. Simple shots and set ups will contrast the complexity of Selenè's life at this time.

## **CHALLENGES**

The most significant challenge that this documentary will face is access to the different locations that Selenè will be at such as school and bars. Conversations with the director of the daycare Selenè currently teaches at are underway.

Another challenge to be faced is the sensitive nature of the activities in this film. Many of Selenè's family are undocumented. Selenè and her associates have used illegal substances in the past and may choose to do so within the time of filming. Continuous consultation will be made with my thesis chairperson and the department to ensure that the subjects, the filmmaker and the school are not compromised.

## **KEY CREW**

### **Director/Cinematographer/Editor**

Weslie Onsando is an independent filmmaker from Kenya and a Master of Fine Arts film production student at the University of Texas at Austin. Her documentaries reach out to a global audience, having worked on numerous productions across continents. She particularly likes to produce documentaries that challenge perception and encourage creative solutions to social dilemmas.

## **PRODUCTION TIMELINE**

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Nov 20, 2015 – Jan 20, 2016	Filming
Jan 21, 2016 – Feb 7, 2016	Organize footage
Feb 8, 2016 - Mar 6, 2016	Rough cut
Mar 6, 2016 – Mar 31, 2016	Fine cut & Begin work with composer
Apr 1, 2016 - Apr 14, 2016	Final Cut
<b>Apr 20, 2016</b>	<b>Picture Lock</b>
Apr 19, 2016 – Apr 29, 2016	Sound design & Color Correction
May 1, 2016 – May 6, 2016	Pre-mix
May 8, 2016 – May 10, 2016	Sound mix
May 11, 2016 – May 13, 2016	Master
May 15, 2016	Screening
May 21, 2016	Graduation

## BUDGET

ITEM	RATE	UNIT	#	Total Cost
<b>PRODUCTION</b>				
Airfare		Allow	1	\$500.00
Accommodation (Hotel)		Allow	1	\$500.00
Meals		Allow	1	\$100.00
Gas		Allow	1	\$200.00
<b>SUBTOTAL PRODUCTION</b>				<b>\$1,300.00</b>
<b>POST PRODUCTION</b>				
Hard Drives		Allow	1	\$100.00
MacBook Pro		Allow	1	\$1,299.00
Color Correction	Daily	Allow	3	\$500.00
Music Composition	One time	Allow	1	\$500.00
Sound Design	Daily	Allow	2	\$300.00
<b>SUBTOTAL POST PRODUCTION</b>				<b>\$3,999.00</b>
<b>OUTREACH</b>				
Festival Entry Fees		Allow	1	\$1,000.00
Travel Filmmaker and Subjects		Allow	1	\$1,000.00
<b>SUBTOTAL OUTREACH</b>				<b>\$2,000.00</b>
<b>CONTINGENCY</b>				<b>\$729.90</b>
<b>TOTAL COST</b>				<b>\$8,028.90</b>

Table 1 Production Budget

## **FUNDRAISING & USE OF FUNDS**

Production of this film so far has been mainly self-sponsored. Moving forward funds will be sought through private donations from friends and family. I will also be applying to the Caucus Foundation Grant for student film. Production funds will mainly facilitate travel to Dallas and to Kentucky, where Selenè will be spending her Christmas and New Year break. Postproduction funds will greatly assist in 2 ways: A swifter post-production workflow by giving the editor continuous and easy access to editing tools as well as to reimburse specialized postproduction team such as the colorist and music composer.

## Appendix B- Figures



Fig. 1 How I see Selené



Fig. 2 How I see Selené 2



Fig. 3 Passing out water bottles with friends from church



Fig. 4 Selené and her favorite painting



## Appendix C- Screenshots



Fig. 5 Selené teaching children about angels at Sabbath School



Fig. 6 Selené explains their immigration status to her 6-year old brother



Fig 7 Selené painting at a party in her house

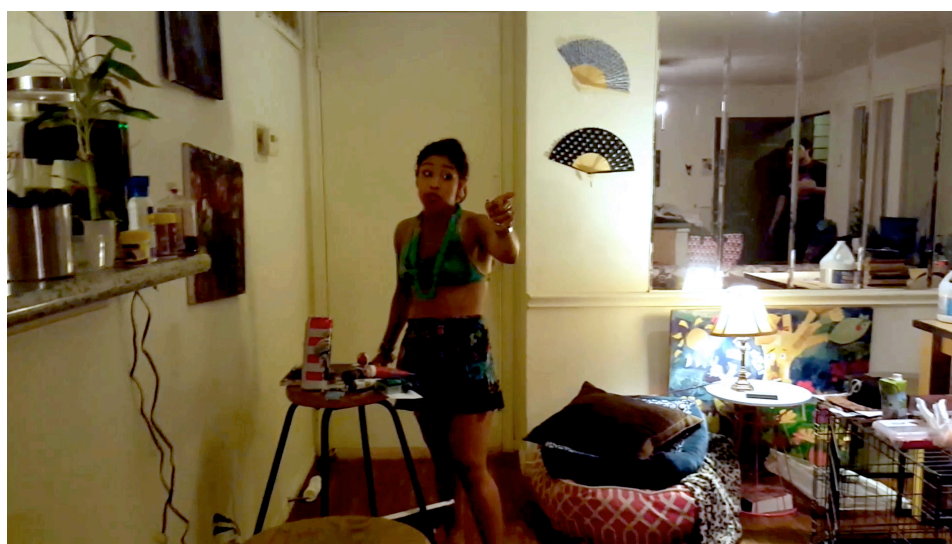


Fig 8 Selené confronts a friend about his rumored domestic abuse



## **References**

"Children Art Studio Sophia." ARTSOPHIACOM. N.p., 17 June 2016. Web. 09 Aug. 2016.

"Your Kids Art-Make a Memory." Sierra Oaks PTA. N.p., 27 Jan. 2015. Web. 09 Aug. 2016.